

Inspection of The Austen Academy

Shakespeare Road, The Austen Academy, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG24 9BP

Inspection dates:

27 and 28 September 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5
of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils who attend The Austen Academy have social communication needs associated with a diagnosis of autism. Typically, they have had poor experiences of school in the past. Staff work tirelessly to make pupils' first days and weeks highly positive. As a result, pupils develop positive, respectful relationships with others, and they settle in quickly. Staff resolve bullying and unkind behaviour swiftly.

Staff find out as much as possible about pupils' needs and interests. They use this information to plan the curriculum. However, the lessons some pupils experience are not consistently well planned and sequenced to build on what they already know. Consequently, the quality of education pupils receive requires improvement.

Many pupils have high anxiety. The start of the school day is organised well and helps to reduce this. Staff recognise the importance of meeting and greeting pupils. Milo, Rusa and Snoopy, the school dogs, have a calming effect.

Staff skilfully develop pupils' confidence, encouraging them to do things for themselves at every opportunity. Staff are acutely aware of the need for pupils to be able to lead independent lives in the future.

Echoing the views of other parents, one told inspectors, 'This school has been life changing for our child'.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The Austen Academy opened its doors for the first time in April 2021. The headteacher, together with an enthusiastic local governing body, have created a clear vision to provide a high-quality education for pupils. However, this vision has not been realised.

Many staff are new to the school because of the rapid increase in pupil numbers. This has meant that, until recently, there has been a lack of expertise to develop the curriculum, particularly in the secondary phase.

Leaders and teachers are focused on teaching pupils what they need to know for their future study and employment. When pupils join the school, they are carefully assessed. Teachers use this information with varying degrees of success to plan sequences of lessons that pupils enjoy. The links between the primary and secondary phases are not coherent. Leaders are rightly addressing this. In some secondary subjects, teachers are not clear about why they have selected lesson content or how individual lessons link together so that pupils make progress over time.

The teaching of reading is not as developed as leaders would like. They have rightly identified this as a priority. Good links with the local library service mean that the

primary and secondary libraries are well stocked with interesting books for pupils to read. Timetabled sessions provide pupils with opportunities for reading. Most lessons also promote reading. Leaders have adopted a phonics programme, but this is not used well enough to support struggling readers.

Staff use autism-friendly strategies across the school. Therapy and sensory rooms, as well as breakout rooms, are all used effectively to manage pupils' emotions and feelings. Visual prompts help pupils to communicate their wishes and desires independently.

Staff have high expectations for pupils' behaviour. A rewards system encourages pupils to do the right thing and to take responsibility for their actions. Consequently, they behave well, moving around the school calmly and sensibly, listening to staff instructions. Breaktimes and lunchtimes are equally calm and provide ample opportunities for pupils to socialise with their friends.

The personal development of pupils is good. Pupils learn about important topics such as online safety, healthy relationships and different faiths. Opportunities to join the school council support younger pupils or join the police cadets all help to develop their confidence. Staff encourage pupils to think ahead and consider their futures.

Local governors are committed to supporting the vision of the school and are gaining confidence but are inexperienced. They are keen to carry out their responsibilities. However, there is some lack of clarity over how to monitor the areas they are responsible for. This hinders governors in challenging leaders more robustly, for example about the curriculum. They accept that they need to challenge leaders more effectively.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Pupils quickly develop a sense of security when they join the school. Staff are well trained and use their knowledge and experience to swiftly identify concerns about pupils. Safeguarding leaders take the appropriate actions. They work together with external partners to provide the right help for pupils. Staff teach pupils how to stay safe, including online. Pupils are confident that staff will act if they have worries about anything. Some aspects of leaders' record-keeping need to be improved. This is something that leaders recognise and this work is underway.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Curriculum planning in the primary phase does not link coherently enough with what pupils learn in the secondary phase. In some secondary subjects, lessons do not build on what pupils have already learned and do not prepare them

sufficiently for future learning. This means that pupils do not make the progress they should. Leaders need to ensure that pupils' progression through the curriculum is more carefully planned.

- Leaders do not systematically monitor the curriculum. As a result, they have not identified all the areas of the curriculum that need improvement. Leaders should ensure that monitoring helps them to improve the curriculum.
- Local governors do not monitor leaders' work closely enough. Consequently, they have not identified some of the school's weaknesses, notably in relation to the curriculum. Governors should challenge the work of leaders more robustly.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	148343
Local authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	10249702
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	4 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	91
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Kath Grant
Headteacher	Liz Cooper
Website	www.austenacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	24 February 2021, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The Austen Academy opened in April 2021 and is part of Catch-22 multi-academy trust.
- The headteacher is responsible for the day-to-day running of the school. An executive headteacher oversees the work of this school and two others in the multi-academy trust.
- All pupils attending The Austen Academy have an education, health and care plan.
- The number of pupils attending the school has increased quickly since the school opened.
- The school uses one registered and two unregistered alternative provisions.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held a wide range of meetings with the executive headteacher, the headteacher and other school leaders.
- The lead inspector held a discussion with a representative of Hampshire local authority and met with the interim chief executive officer of Catch-22 multi-academy trust.
- The lead inspector met with the chair of the local governing body and two other local governors.
- The lead inspector met with the chair of the board of trustees.
- The lead inspector spoke to representatives from the alternative provisions used by the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading and English, mathematics and history. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors held a further meeting about the curriculum and considered curriculum planning in a range of subjects.
- Inspectors checked a range of policies and documents, including the school's single central record. They also reviewed the school's website.
- Inspectors spoke to a range of staff and pupils throughout the inspection to gain their views about the school. Inspectors met with small groups of pupils during the inspection.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents submitted through Ofsted Parent View. The views of staff were also considered through the Ofsted staff survey.

Inspection team

Shaun Jarvis, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Tom Neave

Ofsted Inspector

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